

law enforcement priority. We must provide for more prosecutors and probation officers, tougher penalties, and also better gang prevention efforts, including after-school programs, so that these young people have something to say yes to and some way of staying out of trouble. And we should prohibit violent teenagers from buying guns once they become adults. The same proscriptions of the Brady law should apply to them.

We also, of course, will never be able to supplant the work that must be done by parents in working hard to teach their children that no matter how hard it is, they must do the right thing and reject the wrong course.

For too many years, our people feared that crime would always grow and grow, that nothing could be done to stem lawlessness and violence. But working together—police and parents, public officials and responsible industry leaders—

we are making a difference in the lives of our families.

I especially want to thank, again, the “Top Cops” for their truly heroic contributions. And through them, I thank all the others who might well have been here today but who still do their jobs every day and also deserve our thanks, in every community in this country. Because of that kind of bravery every day, America is moving forward into a new century with safer streets and much, much greater peace of mind.

Thank you very much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Thomas J. Scotto, president, and Robert T. Scully, executive director, National Association of Police Organizations; Raymond W. Kelly, Under Secretary (Enforcement), Department of the Treasury; and Richard Feldman, executive director, American Shooting Sports Council.

Statement on Signing the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997

October 9, 1997

I am pleased to sign today H.R. 1420, the “National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997.” This Act will strengthen and improve our National Wildlife Refuge System as we enter the 21st century. It embodies the principle that whether they cast a line, pitch a decoy, or click a shutter, the 30 million Americans who annually visit and enjoy our refuges have one common and enduring interest—the conservation of fish, wildlife, and their habitat. That is what the National Wildlife Refuge System is about and that is what this Act will promote and ensure.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world’s greatest system of lands dedicated to the conservation of fish and wildlife. It is a system founded in faith; a belief that in a country as bountiful and diverse as ours, there ought to be special places that are set aside exclusively for the conservation of fish and wildlife resources. These special places are National Wildlife Refuges where the conservation needs of wildlife are paramount.

Key provisions of H.R. 1420 mirror those of Executive Order 12996, Management and General Public Use of the National Wildlife Refuge System, which I signed in March 1996. These provisions include the mission statement for the Refuge System, the designation of priority public uses, and a requirement that the environmental health of the Refuge System be maintained.

The bill maintains the crucial distinction clearly set forth in my Executive order between wildlife conservation as the dominant refuge goal and compatible wildlife-dependent recreation as a priority public use. Wildlife conservation is the purpose of the refuges. The opportunity for compatible recreational uses are the important benefits that flow from this purpose. This bill recognizes that the use of refuge lands and waters, to the extent that such use can be allowed, shall be reserved first to those recreational activities that depend and thrive on abundant populations of fish and wildlife.

The bill also maintains the strict policy, first established by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, that all refuge

uses must be compatible with the primary purpose or purposes for which the refuge was established. It sets up a sensible, consistent, and public process for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's managers to follow in making compatibility determinations, and it adopts the Fish and Wildlife Service's longstanding regulatory standard for compatibility.

The bill reiterates the specific categories of wildlife-dependent recreation found in Executive Order 12996 that are to be considered as the "priority public uses" for the refuge system: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. Where compatible, refuge managers are to provide increased opportunities for these uses and enhance the attention they receive in refuge management and planning.

Finally, H.R. 1420 maintains the historic Refuge System policy that refuges are "closed until open." That is, in order to ensure that wildlife needs come first, existing refuge lands and waters are closed to public uses until they are specifically opened for such uses. Also as provided in Executive Order 12996, the bill establishes a new process for identifying compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities prior to

the acquisition of new refuge areas, thereby avoiding the temporary closure of ongoing compatible recreational activities.

This bill is the result of extensive negotiations by my Administration, the Congress, and environmental and sportmen's groups. Starting from widely differing positions, they worked intensively to reach the compromise reflected in this legislation. The bill is proof that when there is a shared commitment to do what is right for our natural resources, partisan and ideological differences can be set aside and compromises can be negotiated for the benefit of the common good. It is clearly the most significant conservation legislation to emerge from this Congress to date. I hope and trust the process by which this bill was enacted will serve as a model for future congressional action on other environmental measures.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 9, 1997.

NOTE: H.R. 1420, approved October 9, was assigned Public Law No. 105-57.

Statement on Signing the Oklahoma City National Memorial Act of 1997 *October 9, 1997*

I am pleased to sign today S. 871, the "Oklahoma City National Memorial Act of 1997." This Act establishes the Oklahoma City National Memorial as a unit of the National Park System to recognize the profound changes brought to so many lives on the tragic morning of April 19, 1995.

The significance of the tragedy of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, and the meaning and implications of this event for our Nation, compel the establishment of this memorial as a visible and prominent national shrine. After the bombing, I proclaimed a National Day of Mourning for those lost in the tragedy. The people of the United States prayed for them and their community as we gathered in our places of worship around the country. When I traveled to Oklahoma City to participate in a memorial service

for the bombing victims, I pledged to do all I could to help heal the injured, to rebuild the city, and to stand by the people of Oklahoma City.

The Oklahoma City Memorial Foundation has done a tremendous job of involving the public, defining its mission and goals, and holding a design competition for the memorial. Building upon these local efforts, this Act establishes the Oklahoma City Memorial Trust to manage the memorial. This Trust, a Federal Government corporation, will operate within the Department of the Interior in cooperation with the National Park Service to ensure the fulfillment of the obligations and requirements of the laws and policies that govern units of the National Park Systems (NPS).

Through the partnership, the National Park Service will provide technical assistance to the